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**State and Federal Marine Fisheries Agencies Begin Survey  
of Recreational Fishing Vessels on the Atlantic Coast**

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BOSTON – The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*), NOAA Fisheries and the resource agencies of eleven other Atlantic coastal states announced Monday the launch of the For-Hire Survey, a standardized data collection system designed to improve recreational fishing and biological information from charter boats and party/headboats, providing fishery managers with more credible data for responsible management of Atlantic fish stocks.

The For-Hire Survey collects: (1) fishing “effort” data (such as numbers of trips and passengers taken in a given week) through a telephone survey, sampling ten percent of for-hire vessels each week, (2) catch data through in-person interviews with for-hire patrons at dockside access-points, and (3) validation data (through dockside observations) to correct for reporting errors. Catch interviews are ongoing since 1981, as part of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), but the new approach for charter and headboats began June 9, 2003.

“Creating a new system to improve data collection from for-hire patrons is long overdue,” said Division Director Paul Diodati. “Better information will allow managers to develop more flexible management recommendations in the future.”

The For-Hire Survey began in Maine in 1995, and spread to the Gulf of Mexico, Florida, and California based on its success. Twelve other Atlantic coastal states have now adopted the For-Hire Survey as the preferred methodology for collecting data from the for-hire sector. They are New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

The For-Hire Survey is not designed to replace for-hire logbook programs mandated by statute, such as NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region’s vessel trip reports and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ logbook program. However, the survey will be integrated with these programs to minimize reporting burden on vessel captains.

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Given the success of the For-Hire Survey in other areas, the resource managers of Connecticut, South Carolina, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission plan to phase-out their logbook requirements for vessels for-hire following a benchmarking period with the new survey.

In addition to the catch and effort data collected through the For-Hire Survey, the party/headboat fleet will also be randomly selected to carry at-sea samplers. Trained personnel will pay the selected vessel's usual fare to collect length and weight measurements on caught and released species, as well as other biological data while the boat is at sea. Combined with other data from the For-Hire Survey, biological and bycatch data will help support stock assessment science.

"We are pleased that the state and federal partners of the Atlantic coast have adopted the For-Hire Survey," said Maury Osborn, Director of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a partnership of 23 state and federal fishery management agencies. "This is the single largest improvement that could be made to the accuracy and precision of data for the for-hire fishery."

The survey is coordinated through the ACCSP a cooperative state-federal program that aims to design, implement, and conduct marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and to integrate those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. It is composed of representatives from natural resource management agencies coastwide, including the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, PRFC, the D.C. Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

For further information visit our website at [www.mass.gov/marinefisheries](http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries), NOAA Fisheries at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov) or ACCSP at [www.accsp.org](http://www.accsp.org).